

THE WALLOW OF THE SEA¹

By MARY HEATON VORSE

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AFTER twenty years I saw Deolda Costa again, Deolda who, when I was a girl, had meant to me beauty and romance. There she sat before me, large, mountainous, her lithe gypsy body clothed in fat. Her dark eyes, beautiful as ever, still with a hint of wildness, met mine proudly. And as she looked at me the old doubts rose again in my mind, a cold chill crawled up my back as I thought what was locked in Deolda's heart. My mind went back to that night twenty years ago, with the rain beating its devil's tattoo against the window, when all night long I sat holding Deolda's hand while she never spoke or stirred the hours through, but stared with her crazy, smut-rimmed eyes out into the storm where Johnny Deutra was. I heard again the shuttle of her feet weaving up and down the room through the long hours.

It was a strange thing to see Deolda after having known her as I did. There she was, with her delight of life all changed into youngsters and fat. There she was, heavy as a monument, and the devil in her divided among her children — though Deolda had plenty of devil to divide.

My first thought was: "Here's the end of romance. To think that you once were love, passion, and maybe even carried death in your hand — and when I look at you now!"

Then the thought came to me, "After all, it is a greater romance that she should have triumphed completely, that the weakness of remorse has never set its fangs in

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her heart." She had seized the one loophole that life had given her and had infused her relentless courage into another's veins.

I was at the bottom of Deolda Costa's coming to live with my aunt Josephine Kingsbury, for I had been what my mother called "peaked," and was sent down to the seashore to visit her. And suddenly I, an inland child, found myself in a world of romance whose very colors were changed. I had lived in a world of swimming green with faint blue distance; hills ringed us mildly; wide, green fields lapped up to our houses; islands of shade trees dotted the fields.

My world of romance was blue and gray, with the savage dunes glittering gold in the sun. Here life was intense. Danger lurked always under the horizon. Lights, like warning eyes, flashed at night, and through the drenching fog, bells on reefs talked to invisible ships. Old men who told tales of storm and strange, savage islands, of great catches of fish, of smuggling, visited my aunt.

Then, as if this were merely the background of a drama, Deolda Costa came to live with us in a prosaic enough fashion, as a "girl to help out."

If you ask me how my aunt, a decent, law-abiding woman — a sick woman at that — took a firebrand like Deolda into her home, all I would be able to answer is: If you had seen her stand there, as I did, on the porch that morning, you wouldn't ask the question. The door-bell rang and my aunt opened it, I tagging behind. There was a girl there who looked as though she were daring all mankind, a strange girl with skin tawny, like sand on a hot day, and dark, brooding eyes. My aunt said:

"You want to see me?"

The girl glanced up slowly under her dark brows that looked as if they had been drawn with a pencil.

"I've come to work for you," she said in a shy, friendly fashion. "I'm a real strong girl."

No one could have turned her away, not unless he were deaf and blind, not unless he were ready to murder happiness. I was fifteen and romantic, and I was bedazzled just as the others were. She made me think of dancing

women I had heard of, and music, and of soft, starlit nights, velvet black. She was more foreign than anything I had ever seen and she meant to me what she did to plenty of others — romance. She must have meant it to my aunt, sick as she was and needing a hired girl. So when Deolda asked, in that soft way of hers:

“ Shall I stay? ”

“ Yes,” answered my aunt, reluctantly, her eyes on the girl’s lovely mouth.

While she stood there, her shoulders drooping, her eyes searching my aunt’s face, she still found time to shoot a glance like a flaming signal to Johnny Deutra, staring at her agape. I surprised the glance, and so did my aunt Josephine, who must have known she was in for nothing but trouble. And so was Johnny Deutra, for from that first glance of Deolda’s that dared him, love laid its heavy hand on his young shoulders.

“ What’s your name, dear? ” my aunt asked.

“ Deolda Costa,” said she.

“ Oh, you’re one-armed Manel’s girl. I don’t remember seeing you about lately.”

“ I been working to New Bedford. My father an’ mother both died. I came up for the funeral. I — don’t want to go back to the mills — ” Then sudden fury flamed in her. “ I hate the men there! ” she cried. “ I’d drown before I’d go back! ”

“ There, there, dear,” my aunt soothed her. “ You ain’t going back — you’re going to work for Auntie Kingsbury.”

That was the way Deolda had. She never gave one any chance for an illusion about her, for there was handsome Johnny Deutra still hanging round the gate watching Deolda, and she already held my aunt’s heart in her slender hand.

My aunt went around muttering, “ One-armed Manel’s girl! ” She appealed to me: “ She’s got to live somewhere, hasn’t she? ”

I imagine that my aunt excused herself for deliberately, running into foul weather by telling herself that Deolda was her “ lot,” something the Lord had sent her to take care of.

"Who was one-armed Manel?" I asked, tagging after my aunt.

"Oh, he was a queer old one-armed Portygee who lived down along," said my aunt, "clear down along under the sand dunes in a green-painted house with a garden in front of it with as many colors as Joseph's coat. Those Costas lived 'most any way." Then my aunt added, over her shoulder: "They say the old woman was a gypsy and got married to one-armed Manel jumping over a broomstick. And I wouldn't wonder a mite if 'twas true. She was a queer looking old hag with black, piercing eyes and a proud way of walking. The boys are a wild crew. Why, I remember this girl Deolda, like a little leopard cat with blue-black shadows in her hair and eyes like saucers, selling berries at the back door!"

My uncle Ariel, Aunt Josephine's brother, came in after a while. As he took a look at Deolda going out of the room, he said:

"P — hew! What's that?"

"I told you I was sick and had to get a girl to help out — what with Susie visiting and all," said my aunt, very short.

"Help out? Help out! My lord! *help out!* What's her name — Beth Sheba?"

Now this wasn't as silly as it sounded. I suppose what Uncle Ariel meant was that Deolda made him think of Eastern queens and Araby. But my attention was distracted by the appearance of two wild-looking boys with a green-blue sea chest which served Deolda as a trunk. I followed it to her room and started making friends with Deolda, who opened the trunk, and I glimpsed something embroidered in red flowers.

"Oh, Deolda, let me see. Oh, let me see!" I cried.

It was a saffron shawl all embroidered with splotchy red flowers as big as my hand. It made me tingle as it lay there in its crinkly folds, telling of another civilization and other lands than our somber shores. The shawl and its crawling, venomous, alluring flowers marked Deolda off from us. She seemed to belong to the shawl and its scarlet insinuations.

"That was my mother's," she said. Then she added

this astounding thing: "My mother was a great dancer. All Lisbon went wild about her. When she danced the whole town went crazy. The bullfighters and the princes would come —"

"But how — ?" I started, and stopped, for Deolda had dropped beside the chest and pressed her face in the shawl, and I remembered that her mother was dead only a few days ago, and I couldn't ask her how the great dancer came to be in Dennisport in the cabin under the dunes. I tiptoed out, my heart thrilled with romance for the gypsy dancer's daughter.

When my aunt was ready for bed there was no Deolda. Later came the sound of footsteps and my aunt's voice in the hall outside my room.

"That you, Deolda?"

"Yes'm."

"Where were you all evening?"

"Oh, just out under the lilacs."

"For pity's sake! Out under the lilacs! What were you doing out there?"

Deolda's voice came clear and tranquil. "Making love with Johnny Deutra."

I held my breath. What can you do when a girl tells the truth unabashed.

"I've known Johnny Deutra ever since he came from the Islands, Deolda," my aunt said, sternly. "He'll mean it when he falls in love."

"I know it," said Deolda, with a little breathless catch in her voice.

"He's only a kid. He's barely twenty," my aunt went on, inexorably. "He's got to help his mother. He's not got enough to marry; any girl who married him would have to live with the old folks. Look where you're going, Deolda."

There was silence, and I heard their footsteps going to their rooms.

The next day Deolda went to walk, and back she came, old Conboy driving her in his motor. Old Conboy was rich; he had one of the first motors on the Cape, when cars were still a wonder. After that Deolda went off in Conboy's motor as soon as her dishes were done and

after supper there would be handsome Johnny Deutra. We were profoundly shocked. You may be sure village tongues were already busy after a few days of these goings on.

"Deolda," my aunt said, sternly, "what are you going out with that old Conboy for?"

"I'm going to marry him," Deolda answered.

"You're *what*?"

"Going to marry him," Deolda repeated in her cool, truthful way that always took my breath.

"Has he asked you?" my aunt inquired, sarcastically.

"No, but he will," said Deolda. She looked out under her long, slanting eyes that looked as if they had little red flames dancing in the depths of them.

"But you love Johnny," my aunt went on.

She nodded three times with the gesture of a little girl.

"Do you know what you're headed for, Deolda?" said my aunt. "Do you know what you're doing when you talk about marrying old Conboy and loving that handsome, no-account kid, Johnny?"

We were all three sitting on the bulkheads after supper. It was one of those soft nights with great lazy yellow clouds with pink edges sailing down over the rim of the sea, fleet after fleet of them. I was terribly interested in it all, but horribly shocked, and from my vantage of fifteen years I said.

"Deolda, I think you ought to marry Johnny."

"Fiddledeedee!" said my aunt. "If she had sense she wouldn't marry either one of 'em — one's too old, one's too young."

"She ought to marry Johnny and make a man of him," I persisted, for it seemed ridiculous to me to call Johnny Deutra a boy when he was twenty and handsome as a picture in a book.

My prim words touched some sore place in Deolda. She gave a brief gesture with her hands and pushed the idea from her.

"I can't," she said, "I can't do it over again. Oh, I can't — I can't. I'm afraid of emptiness — empty purses, empty bellies. The last words my mother spoke were to me. She said, '*Deolda, fear nothing but emptiness*'

— *empty bellies, empty hearts.*' She left me something, too."

She went into the house and came back with the saffron shawl, its long fringe trailing on the floor, its red flowers venomous and lovely in the evening light

"You've seen my mother," she said, "but you've seen her a poor old woman. She had everything in the world once. She gave it up for love. I've seen what love comes to. I've seen my mother with her hands callous with work and her temper sharp as a razor edge nagging my father, and my father cursing out us children. She had a whole city in love with her and she gave up everything to run away with my father. He was jealous and wanted her for himself. He got her to marry him. Then he lost his arm and they were poor and her voice went. I've seen where love goes. If I married Johnny I'd go and live at Deutra's and I'd have kids, and old Ma Deutra would hate me and scream at me just like my mother used to. It would be going back, right back in the trap I've just come out of."

What she said gave me an entirely new vision of life and love. "They were married and lived happy ever afterward" was what I had read in books. Now I saw all at once the other side of the medal. It was my first contact, too, with a nature strong enough to attempt to subdue life to will. I had seen only the subservient ones who had accepted life.

Deolda was a fierce and passionate reaction against destiny. It's a queer thing, when you think of it, for a girl to be brought up face to face with the wreck of a tragic passion, to grow up in the house with love's ashes and to see what were lovers turned into an old hag and a cantankerous, one-armed man nagging each other.

My aunt made one more argument. "What makes you get married to any of 'em, Deolda?"

Now Deolda looked at her with a queer look; then she gave a queer laugh like a short bark.

"I can't stay here forever. I'm not going back to the mill."

Then my aunt surprised me by throwing her arms around Deolda and kissing her and calling her "my poor

lamb," while Deolda leaned up against my aunt as if she were her own little girl and snuggled up in a way that would break your heart.

One afternoon soon after old Conboy brought Deolda home before tea time, and as she jumped out:

"Oh, all right!" he called after her. "Have your own way; I'll marry you if you want me to!"

She made him pay for this. "You see," she said to my aunt, "I told you I was going to marry him."

"Well, then come out motoring tonight when you've got your dishes done," called old Conboy.

"I'm going to the breakwater with Johnny Deutra tonight," said Deolda, in that awful truthful way of hers.

"You see what you get," said my aunt, "if you marry that girl."

"I'll get worse not marrying her," said Conboy. "I may die any minute; I've a high blood pressure, and maybe a stroke will carry me off any day. But I've never wanted anything in many years as I want to hold Deolda in my arms."

"Shame on you!" cried my aunt. "An old man like you!"

So things went on. Johnny kept right on coming. My aunt would fume about it, but she did nothing. We were all under Deolda's enchantment. As for me, I adored her; she had a look that always disarmed me. She would sit brooding with a look I had come to know as the "Deolda look." Tears would come to her eyes and slide down her face.

"Deolda," I would plead, "what are you crying about?"

"Life," she answered.

But I knew that she was crying because Johnny Deutra was only a boy. Then she would change into a mood of wild gayety, whip the shawl around her, and dance for me, looking a thousand times more beautiful than anyone I had ever seen. And then she would shove me out of the room, leaving me feeling as though I had witnessed some strange rite at once beautiful and unholy.

She'd sit mocking Conboy, but he'd only smile. She'd go off with her other love and my aunt powerless to stop

her. As for Johnny Deutra, he was so in love that all he saw was Deolda. I don't believe he ever thought that she was in earnest about old Conboy.

So things stood when one day Capt. Mark Hammar came driving up with Conboy to take Deolda out. Mark was his real name, but Nick was what they called him, after the "Old Nick," for he was a devil if there ever was one, a big, rollicking devil — that is, outwardly. But gossips said no crueller man ever drove a crew for the third summer into the Northern Seas. I didn't like the way he looked at Deolda from the first, with his narrowed eyes and his smiling mouth. My aunt didn't like the way she signaled back to him. We watched them go, my aunt saying

"No good'll come of that!" And no good did.

All three of them came back excited and laughing. Old Conboy, tall as Mark Hammar, wide-shouldered, shambling like a bear, but a fine figure of an old fellow for all that; Mark Hammar, heavy and splendid in his sinister fashion; and between them Deolda with her big, red mouth and her sallow skin and her eyes burning as they did when she was excited.

"I'm saying to Deolda here," said Captain Hammar, coming up to my aunt, "that I'll make a better runnin' mate than Conboy." He drew her up to him. There was something alike about them; the same devil flamed out of the eyes of both of them. Their glances met like forked lightning. "I've got a lot more money than him, too," said Hammar, jerking his thumb toward Conboy. He roused the devil in Deolda.

"You may have more money," said she, "but you'll live longer! And I want to be a rich widow!"

"Stop your joking," my aunt said, sharply. "It don't sound nice."

"Joking?" says Captain Hammar, letting his big head lunge forward. "I ain't joking; I'm goin' to marry that girl."

My aunt said no more while they were there. She sat like a ramrod in her chair. That was one of the worst things about Deolda. We cover our bodies decently with clothes, and we ought to cover up our thoughts decently

with words. But Deolda had no shame, and people with her didn't, either. They'd say just what they were thinking about.

After they left Deolda came to Aunt Josephine and put her arms around her like a good, sweet child.

"What's the matter, Auntie?" she asked.

"You — that's what. I can't stand it to hear you go on."

Deolda looked at her with a sort of wonder. "We were only saying out loud what every girl's thinking about when she marries a man of forty-five, or when she marries a man who's sixty-five. It's a trade — the world's like that."

"Let me tell you one thing," said my aunt. "You can't fool with Capt. Mark Hammar. It means that you give up your other sweetheart."

"That's to be seen," said Deolda in her dark, sultry way. Then she said, as if she was talking to herself: "Life — with him — would be interesting. He thinks he could crush me like a fly. — He can't, though —" And then all of a sudden she burst into tears and threw herself in my aunt's lap, sobbing: "Oh, oh! Why's life like this? Why isn't my Johnny grown up? Why — don't he — take me away — from them all?"

After that Captain Hammar kept coming to the house. He showed well enough he was serious.

"That black devil's hypnotized her," my aunt put it.

Deolda seemed to have some awful kinship to Mark Hammar, and Johnny Deutra, who never paid much attention to old Conboy, paid attention to him. Black looks passed between them, and I would catch "Nick" Hammar's eyes resting on Johnny with a smiling venom that struck fear into me. Johnny Deutra seldom came daytimes, but he came in late one afternoon and sat there looking moodily at Deolda, who flung past him with the air she had when she wore the saffron shawl. I could almost see its long fringes trailing behind her as she stood before him, one hand on her tilted hip, her head on one side.

It was a queer sort of day, a day with storm in the air, a day when all our nerves got on edge, when the possi-

bility of danger whips the blood. I had an uncomfortable sense of knowing that I ought to leave Deolda and Johnny and that Johnny was waiting for me to go to talk. And yet I was fascinated, as little girls are; and just as I was about to leave the room I ran into old Conboy hurrying in, his reddish hair standing on end.

"Well, Deolda," said he, "Captain Hammar's gone down the Cape all of a sudden. He told me to tell you good-by for him. Deolda, for God's sake, marry me before he comes back! He'll kill you, that's what he'll do. It's not for my sake I'm asking you — it's for your sake!"

She looked at him with her big black eyes. "I believe you mean that, Conboy. I believe I'll do it. But I'll be fair and square with you as you are with me. You'd better let me be; you know what I'm like. I won't make you happy; I never pretended I would. And as for him killing me, how do you know, Conboy, I mightn't lose my temper first?"

"He'll break you," said Conboy. "God! but he's a man without pity! Don't you know how he drives his men? Don't you know the stories about his first wife? He's put some of his magic on you. You're nothing but a poor little lamb, Deolda, playing with a wolf, for all your spirit. There's nothing he'd stop at. Nothing," he repeated, staring at Johnny. "I wouldn't give a cent for that Johnny Deutra's life until I'm married to you, Deolda. I've seen the way Mark Hammar looks at him — you have, too. I tell you, Mark Hammar don't value the life of any man who stands in his way!" And the way the old man spoke lifted the hair on my head.

Then all of us were quiet, for there stood Captain Hammar himself.

"Why, Mark, I thought you'd gone down the Cape!" said Conboy.

"I lost the train," he answered.

"Well, what about that vessel you was going to buy in Gloucester?"

"I got to sail over," said Captain Hammar.

Conboy glanced out of the window. The bay was ringed around with heavy clouds; weather was making. Storm signals were flying up on Town Hill, and down

the harbor a fleet of scared vessels were making for port.

"You can't go out in that, Mark," says Conboy.

"I've got the money," says Mark Hammar, "and I'm going to go. If I don't get down there that crazy Portygee'll have sold that vessel to some one else. It ain't every day you can buy a vessel like that for the price. He let me know about it first, but he won't wait long, and he's got to have the cash in his hands. He's up to some crooked work or he wouldn't 'a' sent the boy down with the letter; he'd 'a' sent it by post, or telegraphed even. He's let me know about it first, but he won't wait. It was getting the money strapped up that made me late. I had to wait for the old cashier to get back from his dinner."

"You and your money'll be in the bottom of the bay, that's where you'll be," said Conboy.

"If I'd taken in sail for every little bit o' wind I'd encountered in my life," said Mark Hammar, "I'd not be where I am now. So I just thought I'd come and run in on Deolda before I left, seeing as I'm going to marry her when I get back."

Johnny Deutra undid his long length from the chair. He was a tall, heavy boy, making up in looks for what he lacked in head. He came and stood over Mark Hammar. He said:

"I've had enough of this. I've had just enough of you two hanging around Deolda. She's my woman — I'm going to marry Deolda myself. Nobody else is going to touch her; so just as soon as you two want to clear out you can."

There was silence so that you could hear a pin drop. And then the wind that had been making hit the house like the blow of a fist and went screaming down the road. Deolda didn't see or hear; she was just looking at Johnny. He went to her.

"Don't you listen to 'em, Deolda. I'll make money for you; I'll make more than any of 'em. It's right you should want it. Tell 'em that you're going to marry me, Deolda. Clear 'em out."

That was where he made his mistake. *He* should have cleared them out. Now Captain Hammar spoke:

"You're quite a little man, ain't you, Johnny? Here's

where you got a chance to prove it. You can make a hundred dollars tonight by taking the *Anita* across to Gloucester with me. We'll start right off."

Everyone was quiet. Then old Conboy cried out:

"Don't go, Mark. Don't go! Why, it's *murder* to tempt that boy out there."

At the word "murder" Deolda drew her breath in and clapped her hand over her mouth, her eyes staring at Johnny Deutra. "Nick" Hammar pretended he hadn't noticed. He sat smiling at Johnny.

"We-ll," he drawled. "How about it, Johnny? Goin'?"

Johnny had been studying, his eyes on the floor.

"I'll go with you," he said.

Then again for a half minute nobody spoke. Captain Hammar glared, letting us see what was in his dark mind. Old Conboy shrunk into himself and Deolda sat with her wild eyes going from one to the other, but not moving. We were all thinking of what old Conboy had said just before Captain Hammar had flung open the door. A sudden impulse seized me; I wanted to cry out: "Don't go, Johnny. He'll shove you overboard." For I knew that was what was in "Nick" Hammar's mind as well as if he had told me. A terrible excitement went through me. I wanted to fling myself at "Nick" Hammar and beat him with my fists and say, "He sha'n't go — he sha'n't, he sha'n't!" But I sat there unable to move or speak. Then suddenly into the frozen silence came the voice of "Nick" Hammar. This is what he said in his easy and tranquil way:

"Well, I'm goin' along. Are you coming, Conboy?" He spoke as though nothing had happened. "I'll meet you down at the wharf, Johnny, in a half hour. I'll leave you to say good-by to Deolda." They went out, the wind blowing the door shut behind them.

Deolda got up and so did Johnny. They stood facing each other in the queer yellow light of the coming storm. They didn't notice my aunt or me.

"*You going?*" asked Deolda.

They looked into each other's eyes, and he answered so I could barely hear:

"Sure."

"*You know what he's thinking about?*" said Deolda.

Again Johnny waited before he answered in a voice hardly above a whisper:

"I can guess."

Deolda went up slowly to him and put one of her long hands on each of his shoulders. She looked deep into his eyes. She didn't speak; she just looked. And he looked back, as though trying to find out what she had in her heart, and as he looked a little flicker of horror went over his face. Then he smiled a slow smile, as though he had understood something and consented to it — and it was a queer smile to see on the face of a young fellow. It was as if the youth of Johnny Deutra had passed away forever. Then Deolda said to him:

"Good for you, Johnny Deutra!" and put out her hand, and he laid his in hers and they shook on it, though no word had passed between them. And all this time my aunt and I sat motionless on the haircloth sofa next to the wall. And I tell you as I watched them my blood ran cold, though I didn't understand what it was about. But later I understood well enough.

There never was so long an evening. The squall blew over and a heavy blow set in. I could hear the pounding of the waves on the outside shore. Deolda sat outside the circle of the lamp in a horrible tense quiet. My aunt tried to make talk, and made a failure of it. It was awful to hear the clatter of her voice trying to sound natural in the face of the whistle of the storm, and out wallowing in it the gasoline dory with its freight of hatred. I hated to go to bed, for my room gave on the sea, and it seemed as if the night and the tragedy which I had glimpsed would come peering in at me with ghastly eyes.

I had just got under the blanket when the door opened quietly.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"It's me — Deolda."

She went to the window and peered out into the storm, as though she were trying to penetrate its mystery. I couldn't bear her standing there; it was as if I could hear her heart bleed. It was as if for a while I had become fused

with her and her love for Johnny Deutra and with all the dark things that had happened in our house this afternoon. I got out of bed and went to her and put my hand in hers. If she'd only cried, or if she'd only spoken I could have stood it; if she'd said in words what was going on inside her mind. But she sat there with her hand cold in mine, staring into the storm through all the long hours of the night.

Toward the end I was so tired that my mind went to sleep in that way your mind can when your body stays awake and everything seems far off and like things happening in a nightmare except that you know they're real. At last daylight broke, very pale, threatening, and slate colored. Deolda got up and began padding up and down the floor, back and forth, like a soul in torment.

About ten o'clock old Conboy came in.

"I got the license, Deolda," he said.

"All right," said Deolda, "all right — go away." And she kept on padding up and down the room like a leopard in a cage.

Conboy beckoned my aunt out into the entry. I followed.

"What ails her?" he asked.

"I guess she thinks she sent Johnny Deutra to his grave," said my aunt.

Conboy peered in the door at Deolda. Her face looked like a yellow mask of death with her black hair hanging around her.

"God!" he said, in a whisper. "*She cares!*" I don't believe it had dawned on him before that she was anything but a wild devil.

All that day the *Anita* wasn't heard from. That night I was tired out and went to bed. But I couldn't sleep; Deolda sat staring out into the dark as she had the night before.

Next morning I was standing outside the house when one of Deolda's brothers came tearing along. It was Joe, the youngest of one-armed Manel's brood, a boy of sixteen who worked in the fish factory.

"Deolda!" he yelled. "Deolda, Johnny's all right!"

She caught him by the wrist. "Tell me what's happened!"

"The other feller — he's lost."

"Lost?" said Deolda, her breath drawn in sharply.
"Lost — how?"

"Washed overboard," said Joe. "See — looka here. When Johnny got ashore this is what he says." He read aloud from the newspaper he had brought, a word at a time, like a grammar-school kid:

"With a lame propeller and driven out of her course, the *Anita* made Plymouth this morning without her Captain, Mark Hammar. John Deutra, who brought her in, made the following statement:

"'I was lying in my bunk unable to sleep, for we were being combed by waves again and again. Suddenly I noticed we were wallowing in the trough of the sea, and went on deck to see what was wrong. I groped my way to the wheel. It swung empty. Captain Hammar was gone, washed overboard in the storm. How I made port myself I don't know —'

Here his reading was interrupted by an awful noise — Deolda laughing, Deolda laughing and sobbing, her hands above her head, a wild thing, terrible.

"Go on," my aunt told the boy. "Go home!" And she and Deolda went into the house, her laughter filling it with awful sound.

After a time she quieted down. She stood staring out of the window, hands clenched.

"Well?" she said, defiantly. "Well?" She looked at us, and what was in her eyes made chills go down me. Triumph was what was in her eyes. Then suddenly she flung her arms around my aunt and kissed her. "Oh," she cried, "kiss me, Auntie, kiss me! He's not dead, my Johnny — not dead!"

"Go up to your room, Deolda," said my aunt, "and rest." She patted her shoulder just as though she were a little girl, for all the thoughts that were crawling around our hearts.

When later in the day Conboy came, "Where's Deolda?" he asked.

"I'll call her," I said. But Deolda wasn't anywhere; not a sign of her. She'd vanished. Conboy and Aunt Josephine looked at each other.

"She's gone to him," said Conboy.

My aunt leaned toward him and whispered, "*What do you think?*"

"Hush!" said Conboy, sternly. "*Don't think, Josephine! Don't speak. Don't even dream!* Don't let your mind stray. You know that crew couldn't have made port in fair weather together. The strongest man won — that's all!"

"Then you believe —" my aunt began.

"Hush!" he said, and put his hand over her mouth. Then he laughed suddenly and slapped his thigh. "God!" he said. "Deolda — Can you beat her? She's got luck — by gorry, she's got luck! You got a pen and ink?"

"What for?" said my aunt.

"I want to write out a weddin' present for Deolda," he said. "Wouldn't do to have her without a penny."

So he wrote out a check for her. And then in two months old Conboy died and left every other cent to Deolda. You might have imagined him sardonic and grinning over it, looking across at Deolda's luck from the other side of the grave.

But what had happened wasn't luck. I knew that she had sent her Johnny out informed with her own terrible courage. A weaker woman could have kept him back. A weaker woman would have had remorse. But Deolda had the courage to hold what she had taken, and maybe this courage of hers is the very heart of romance.

I looked at her, stately, monumental, and I wondered if she ever thinks of that night when the wallow of the sea claimed Mark Hammar instead of Johnny Deutra. But there's one thing I'm sure of, and that is, if she does think of it the old look of triumph comes over her face.